

AMBASSADE DE FRANCE**SERVICE DE PRESSE ET D'INFORMATION**

972 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 21, N. Y. REgent 7-9700

Reading Room

FRENCH AFFAIRS - No. 27

December 1955

NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO BE ELECTED IN FRANCE

ON JANUARY 2, 1956

Following the dissolution of the National Assembly, proclaimed by decree on December 2, 1955, French voters will go to the polls on January 2, 1956 to elect a new Assembly. The five-year mandate of the deputies elected on June 17, 1951 has thus been shortened by six months.

The principle of earlier elections had already been adopted by the National Assembly on November 2, following debate on a Government-sponsored bill providing that the deputies' term of office be ended on January 2, 1956. The purpose of this measure was to enable a new Assembly, no longer beset by electoral preoccupations, to face the important and urgent decisions which must be taken in the international field, in North Africa and in domestic affairs.

However, although the principle of earlier elections had been approved, no agreement had been reached as to what electoral system would be used. Many of the deputies, in fact, wanted the coming elections to be held under a different system from that prescribed by the Electoral Law of May 9, 1951: voting by departmental list with one ballot and party alliances. The debates on electoral reform in the National Assembly and the Council of the Republic had resulted in a deadlock which threatened to wreck the Government's plan to hold elections in December or, at the latest, in the first weeks of 1956. The Assembly having been asked to vote on a motion giving priority to a debate on the general policy of the Government, the President of the Council of Ministers asked for a vote of confidence against adoption of the proposed motion and for a continuation of the debate on electoral reform.

DISSOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

On November 29, the Cabinet headed by Premier Edgar Faure was refused a vote of confidence by 318 to 218, with 20 abstentions. Since the opposition rallied more than half the total membership of the Assembly (the absolute majority being 314), the Government was automatically forced to resign, in accordance with Article 49 of the Constitution.

2.

Thus was opened the possibility of dissolving the National Assembly. For the Constitution provides, in Article 51, that if two ministerial crises occur, under the conditions set forth in Article 49, within an eighteen-month period--except during the first eighteen months of the legislature--the Council of Ministers may decide to dissolve the Assembly. Dissolution is then proclaimed by a decree of the President of the Republic.

The Faure Government was the second, in less than eighteen months, to have been forced to resign following a vote of no-confidence by the absolute majority of the National Assembly, the Mendès-France Government having been overthrown under similar conditions on February 5, 1955. Thus, all the required conditions were met for dissolution of the Assembly. The Council of Ministers decided to take this step, and the dissolution decree was published in the "Journal Officiel" of December 2. Article 51 of the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, adopted in 1946, had never been previously applied.

As a result of dissolution, the Faure Government will stay in office pending investiture of a new Cabinet by the next Assembly. Moreover, the 1951 electoral law remains in force since the deputies could not secure passage of a new law before expiration of their term.

The new Assembly, which is to be elected on January 2, will convene for the first time on January 19, 1956.

THE ELECTORAL LAW

The 544 deputies representing the 90 Departments of Metropolitan France (1) are elected by direct popular vote, by all men and women over 21 years of age, in accordance with the Law of October 5, 1946, amended by the Law of May 9, 1951.

Constituencies

Voting takes place by constituencies. Each Department forms one constituency, with the exception of the Departments of the Rhône, Bouches-du-Rhône, Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Seine, Seine Maritime, Seine-et-Oise and Gironde, which are divided into two or more constituencies because of their large population.

(1) The 10 deputies representing the Overseas Departments (Guiana, Martinique, Reunion and Guadeloupe) are elected by proportional representation; the Overseas Territories (French Equatorial Africa, French West Africa, etc.) elect 43 deputies--by the uninominal system with a single ballot in the constituencies having only one elected representative, by party list with a single ballot and proportional representation in the constituencies having at least two deputies. The 30 deputies representing the 4 Algerian Departments will be elected at a later date, because of the present situation.

Coalitions

Within a single constituency, the candidates of different parties have the right of allying their lists, that is, of forming a coalition. In order to do this, they must file a declaration of alliance ("apparentement") at the Prefecture of the Department, at the latest 3 days before the opening of the election campaign, which begins 20 days before election day. This declaration must be countersigned by an authorized representative of the central organization of each political party concluding an alliance.

Coalition is possible only between lists of candidates belonging to national parties or groups, that is, parties or groups which present candidates under the same designation in at least 30 Departments. (The purpose of this provision is to avoid a multiplicity of independent lists.)

Distribution of the Seats

If a list receives 50 per cent of the votes cast in one constituency, it wins all the seats. Similarly, if a group of allied lists receives 50 per cent of the votes, it receives all the seats which are then divided among the allied lists according to the system of the quotient and the highest average. (2)

If no list or group of lists receives 50 per cent of the votes cast, the seats are distributed among the various lists of candidates by proportional representation, using the system of the quotient and the rule of the highest average, allied lists being considered as a single list. The seats won by a group of allied lists are always distributed among the lists within the group by proportional representation according to the rule of the highest average.

Special Provisions for the Seine and Seine-et-Oise Departments

In the Departments of the Seine and Seine-et-Oise, the deputies are elected by proportional representation with distribution of the seats by the system of the quotient and the rule of the largest remainder. (3)

Split Tickets and Preferential Voting

Preferential voting is permitted, as follows: the voter may show his preference for one of the candidates on the list by placing a cross next to his name. Moreover, he may split his vote by crossing out a name on one list and replacing it by another name taken from another list. However, when the votes are counted, unless 50 per cent of the ballots cast in any one constituency have been modified in one of the ways described above, no account is taken of the preferential votes and split tickets, and the seats are distributed among the candidates in the same order in which their names are presented on the lists.

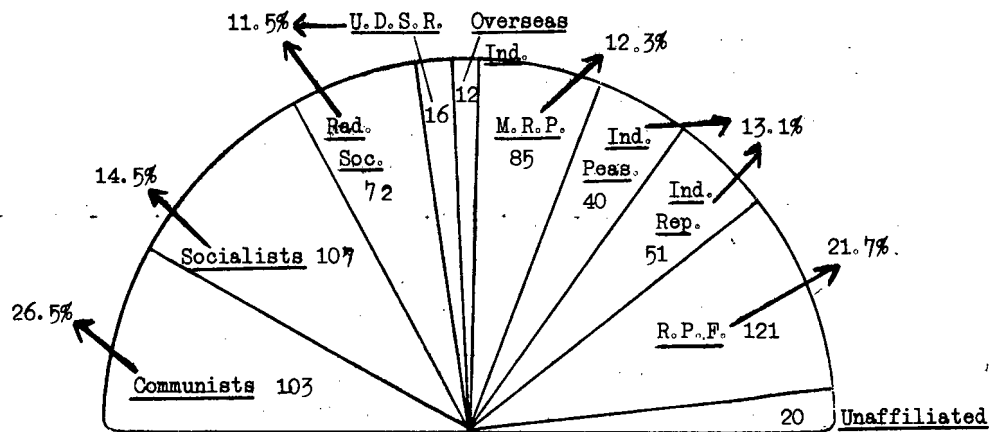
(2) See Explanatory Note A, page 6.

(3) See Explanatory Note B, page 8.

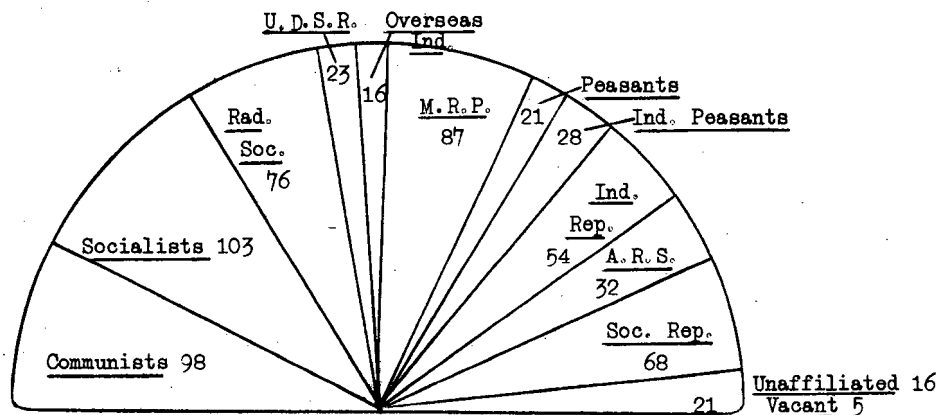
4.

RESULTS OF THE 1951 ELECTIONS - THE ASSEMBLY AT THE END OF THE LEGISLATURE

The distribution of seats in the National Assembly after the 1951 elections is illustrated below. The numbers inside the semi-circle represent the seats won by each party, while the arrows indicate the percentage of the popular vote obtained by each party in Metropolitan France.



Distribution of Seats After the 1951 Elections



Distribution of Seats as of December 1, 1955

The deputies belonging to the Rally of the French People (R.P.F.) were split into two groups, when about a third of them quit the party in 1952 to form the Republican and Social Action group (A.R.S.). The remaining deputies took the name of Social Republicans in 1953.

The Peasant group was formed in 1953, following a split within the Independent Peasant group.

VOTERS AND CANDIDATES IN METROPOLITAN FRANCE

The 544 deputies from Metropolitan France will be elected by some 25.5 million voters, including about 12 million men and 13.5 million women. There are about one million more registered voters than in the last general elections of June 1951.

The total number of candidates is around 5,000, against approximately 4,000 in the 1951 elections. There are 27 "national parties or groups," that is, political forces presenting candidates in more than 30 Departments and thereby entitled to make alliances at the departmental level. These include the 10 major parties currently represented in the National Assembly and seated from right to left, as follows:

- 1) National Center of Social Republicans (Social Republicans, former R.P.F.)
- 2) National Group of Independents for Democratic and Peasant Action (presenting certain outgoing deputies of the A.R.S. or Republican and Social Action group)
- 3) Republican Peasant Party (Peasants)
- 4) National Center of Independents, Peasants and Republican and Social Action (Independent Republicans, Independent Peasants, A.R.S.)
- 5) Popular Republican Movement (M.R.P.)
- 6) Left Republican Rally or R.G.R. (Radical Socialists and U.D.S.R.)
- 7) Democratic and Socialist Resistance Union (U.D.S.R.)
- 8) Radical Republican and Radical Socialist Party
- 9) French Socialist Party (S.F.I.O.)
- 10) French Communist Party

Among the 17 other "national parties or groups"--representing for the most part minor groupings which have formed coalitions in order to be able to ally themselves with other lists--are 3 Poujade-inspired groups and certain surviving prewar groupings such as the "Young Republic."

Party Alliances

Aside from the Communist Party, with which no party has agreed to make alliances, the principal parties or groups currently represented in the National Assembly have allied themselves as follows for the coming elections:

- Socialists: 47 alliances with the Radical Socialists, 9 of which also include Social Republicans.
- Radical Socialists or R.G.R.: 67 alliances, including 47 with the Socialists and 20 with the M.R.P. and/or the Moderates.
- M.R.P.: 52 alliances with the Moderate groups and varied alliances with Social Republican and R.G.R. lists.
- Moderate groups: besides alliances including the M.R.P., 5 alliances with Social Republicans or with various other Moderates.
- Social Republicans: 37 alliances, including 28 with the Moderates and/or the M.R.P.

6.

The Election Campaign

The election campaign was officially opened on December 13, that is, in accordance with the electoral law, 20 days before elections. The last day for filing candidacies was December 10 for allied lists, and December 12 for unaffiliated lists.

In order that all the lists may conduct their campaign on an equal basis, in every constituency each list is granted, at Government expense, a specific quantity of paper for its posters and circulars, as well as a certain allowance, following a given scale, to cover the cost of printing, posting and gasoline. Each individual candidacy must be accompanied by a bond of 20,000 francs (\$57). This sum, plus bill posting and gasoline expenses, is subsequently reimbursed to the candidates, except if their list has obtained less than 5 per cent of the votes cast in the constituency.

An official departmental commission, known as the "election campaign commission" and including a judge and five civil servants, is in charge of designating approved printers and of seeing that the circulars and ballots of all the lists are simultaneously sent to the voters. All posting of bills other than that provided by law is prohibited.

The national parties and groups, as defined by law, may, for campaign purposes, use the facilities of the French Radio and Television System. The conditions concerning broadcast time are the same for all the parties: each is allowed two radio programs--one of ten minutes, the other of five--and a five-minute television program. The dates and hours of these programs are drawn by lot.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

A. Illustrations of the System of the Quotient and the Highest Average

Assume that the total number of votes cast in one constituency is 220,000 and that the number of seats in this constituency is 4. Assume also that there are 5 lists of candidates presented by parties A, B, C, D, E, and that parties B, C, D have concluded an alliance.

First possibility: One list obtains a majority of at least 50%, the votes being cast as follows:

A	25,000	
B	55,000	} 80,000
C	20,000	
D	5,000	
E	115,000	

List E, which has received a majority of over 50%, obtains all 4 seats.

Second possibility: A group of allied lists receives a majority of at least 50%, the votes being cast as follows:

A	20,000	
B	50,000	} 120,000
C	45,000	
D	25,000	
E	80,000	

The 4 seats are therefore distributed among the allied parties, according to the system of the quotient and the highest average. This works as follows:

- a) Determination of the quotient: the number of votes received by the allied lists is divided by the number of seats to be distributed:

$$\frac{120,000}{4} = 30,000 \text{ (quotient)}$$

Distribution of the seats according to the quotient:

B	50,000 votes	1 seat	2
C	45,000 "	1 seat	1
D	25,000 "	0 seat	1

2 seats remain to be distributed.

- b) Determination of the highest average: the number of votes received by each of the allied lists is divided by the number of seats already granted to that list, plus 1. Seats are granted successively to that list which has the highest average, as follows:

B	$\frac{50,000}{2} = 25,000$ (average)	/
C	$\frac{45,000}{2} = 22,500$	"
D	$\frac{25,000}{1} = 25,000$	" /

Since lists B and D have the highest averages, the remaining 2 seats are granted to them, 1 to list B and 1 to list D.

Representation of the district is therefore: B, 2 seats; C, 1 seat; D, 1 seat.

Third possibility: No list or group of allied lists receives a majority of at least 50%, the votes being cast as follows:

A	80,000	40	1
B	30,000	45	2
C	50,000	90,000	1
D	10,000		
E	50,000		

All 4 seats are therefore distributed in proportion to the number of votes received, by the system of the quotient and the rule of the highest average. This works as follows:

- a) Determination of the quotient: the total number of votes cast is divided by the number of seats to be distributed: $\frac{220,000}{4} = 55,000$ (quotient)

Distribution of seats under quotient system:

A	80,000	1 seat
B,C,D	90,000	1 seat
E	50,000	0 seat

Two seats remain to be distributed.

8.

- b) Determination of the highest average: the number of votes for each list or group of lists is divided by the number of seats already granted, plus 1. Seats are granted successively to that list which has the highest average, as follows:

Granting of the third seat	{	A	$\frac{80,000}{2} = 40,000$	
		B,C,D	$\frac{90,000}{2} = 45,000$	
		E	$\frac{50,000}{1} = 50,000$ (highest average)	1 seat

Granting of the fourth seat	{	A	40,000	
		B,C,D	45,000 (highest average)	1 seat
		E	$\frac{50,000}{2} = 25,000$	

Since allied lists B,C,D have the highest average, the fourth seat goes to that group. They have won two seats which are distributed within the group by the system of the quotient and the rule of the highest average. The seats, therefore go respectively to B and C.

Representation of the district is therefore as follows: A, 1 seat; B, 1 seat; C, 1 seat; E, 1 seat;

B. Illustration of the system of proportional representation according to the largest remainder: (system used in the Seine and Seine-et-Oise Departments)

Assume again that the total number of votes cast in the district is 220,000, and that the number of seats in this district is 4. Alliances between lists are not possible in the districts which have proportional representation. The votes cast are as follows:

A	80,000
B	70,000
C	5,000
D	65,000

The quotient is $\frac{220,000}{4} = 55,000$. Lists A, B and D which have each received more votes than the quotient (and less than double the quotient) receive 1 seat each.

The remainder of votes for each list is:

A	$80,000 - 55,000 = 25,000$ (highest remainder)
B	$70,000 - 55,000 = 15,000$
C	5,000
D	$65,000 - 55,000 = 10,000$

List A has the largest remainder and therefore obtains the fourth seat.

Representation of the district is therefore: A, 2 seats; B, 1 seat; D, 1 seat.